

criticism. There is no province of social life in which the fashioning of a new scale of social values on the Puritan anvil is more clearly revealed. In the little communities of peasants and craftsmen which composed mediaeval England, all, when Heaven sent a bad harvest, had starved together, and the misery of the sick, the orphan and the aged had appeared as a personal calamity, not as a social problem. Apart from a few precocious theorists, who hinted at the need for a universal and secular system of provision for distress, the teaching most characteristic of mediaeval writers had been that the relief of the needy was a primary obligation on those who had means. St. Thomas, who in this matter is typical, quotes with approval the strong words of St. Ambrose about those who cling to the bread of the starving, insists on the idea that property is stewardship, and concludes—a conclusion not always drawn from that well-worn phrase—that to withhold alms when there is evident and urgent necessity is mortal sin.¹ Popular feeling had lent a half-mystical glamour, both to poverty and to the compassion by which poverty was relieved, for poor men were God's friends. At best, the poor were thought to represent our Lord in a peculiarly intimate way—"in that sect," as Langland said, "our Saviour

saved all
mankind"—and it was necessary for the
author of
a religious manual to explain that the rich,
as such,
were not necessarily hateful to God,^{lu} At
worst,
men reflected that the prayers of the poor
availed
much, and that the sinner had been saved
from hell by
throwing a loaf of bread to a beggar, even
though a
curse went with it. The alms bestowed to-
day would
be repaid a thousand-fold, when the soul took
its dreadful
journey amid rending briars and scorching
flames*

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon,
Everie nighte and aUe>
Sit thee down and put them on,
And Christe receive thy souk.